

And we might all well pray it; and all through this holy month, we might strive to live so that others will not need to "forgive us our Christmas" ways. Pressures mount. Our shopping list grows. Radio voices remind us that we have only so many more days. School and clubs and other activities have extra programs.

We say each year, "Next year I won't get caught in the rush." But here we go, clutching our purses and tearing through the crowds, thinking, "Now what on earth would so-and-so like?" The late Peter Marshall puts into words that deeper inner feeling we've had all along:

You can't think of anything they need
 (which is rather strange when you take time to think of it).
 Maybe there is nothing in a store that they need.
 But what about some token of love—what about love itself . . .
 and friendship . . .
 and understanding . . .
 and consideration . . .
 and a helping hand . . .
 and a smile . . .
 and a prayer?
 . . . Christmas is not in the stores—but in the hearts of
 people.

Suppose we started this very year. First, we'll think much about the *person* . . . we'll lift our thoughts to God in prayer . . . we'll seek to be guided by deeper impulses of love from within ourselves . . . maybe our final choices of gifts won't be as costly in money, but they'll come from our hearts. We'll think especially of persons who are in need—

the hungry in our own towns and over the seas; the lonely-hearted; the aged.

We'll discover that each day, no matter how rushed, we can look at the people around us and respond to them with sympathy, forgiveness, understanding. These we may take as our three gifts, even as the Wise Men brought three to the Christ child! When a sales girl is too tired to smile, we'll smile and make the chore of waiting on us as pleasant and easy as possible. When a waitress makes a mistake, we'll try to remember that perhaps her feet hurt, or her husband is sick. When a teacher gives a grade lower than we know we deserve, we'll try to extend to him the forgiveness we'd want if we had made a mistake ourselves.

And on from Christmas, through the coming days of the year, these three gifts passed on, will multiply as in turn the receivers pass them on to others. We'll find our own thoughts growing deeper, our compassion and human understanding stretching and strengthening—even as our muscles strengthen when we exercise. We'll grow to be delightful persons to give the world: persons with that rare quality of understanding that everybody needs so much all year long.

But surprise! As on Christmas morning when we hadn't anticipated a special gift, there will keep coming back to us in full splendid measure—joyous response and understanding from others: the true Christmassy feeling, *lived* all year long.⁴

Feather Lei

My Indian princess of 7 short summers
My dusky wahine of 7 long rainy seasons
Your sapling body will not be bent by me.
Though I could not bind you to papooseboard,
nor stop my wince as I fed you fish and poi,
you are me, but so much more.

But my Uilani, beautiful sound of the wind,
you daddy is the only one I know
who knows just how to weave a feather lei.

Feathered

My Indian princess of 12 first summer
my dusty machine of 1 long rainy season
your smiling face will not be lost by me
though I could not look you to gaze
can stop my name as I feel you like and you
you are not, but so much more
but my vision, beautiful sound of the wind
you baby, is the only one I know
who knows just how to wear a feathered

LENTEN LIVING ROOM GROUPS

Positive Consequences of the Program

1. People have an unusually deep experience with God. Prayer takes on a deeper meaning.
2. People experience intimacy with brothers and sisters. In our community, *particularly*, people are lonely ---- *even* the very busy ones.
3. Many will sign up for a six week experience (*especially during Lent*) who would not commit themselves to a longer period of time. After a positive six week experience, many will then be open to more permanent experiences -- such as "Families".
4. You will draw new people to your Church. We now have a number of persons as members of MCCLA who had their first serious involvement with us in a Lenten group.

Steps to be taken

1. Get the support of your Board and name a committee of able persons to direct the program. Most of our Pastors are too busy to carry the entire program alone. Many of you may be able to enlist brothers and sisters from our wider community who are not members of your church (but who have particular skills in working with small groups) to serve as consultants --- or even as members of the committee. While the Pastor will direct the entire program, he/she will get much-needed assistance from the committee.
2. Make this a top priority for your church for the period from *Ash Wednesday* (March 3) to *Easter* (April 18).
Maybe you will want to *temporarily* set aside some other activities in order to focus on a strong Lenten program.
3. Estimate how many Lenten groups you will need. Our experience was that 60% of our average Sunday morning attendance signed up. My guess is that in most congregations, *at least* this percentage will sign up. Since groups will meet in Living Rooms they should not be larger than 10 members --- plus 2 co-leaders.
4. Select your leaders. You will need to train two co-leaders for each group. You also ought to add several others to cover drop-outs and/or emergencies. Make it clear when approaching potential leaders that they will have to commit one night per week for 6 weeks of training, before Lent (*beginning January 20, at the latest*) and one night per week for the 6 weeks of Lent. People are flattered to be selected for such an important position. The Manual will contain practical suggestions on this important step of leadership selection. *It is far more important that the Leader be able to lead a group discussion than that he/she be a Bible scholar.* Approach your best people for this honor.

The Materials

The Lenten Program is a Bible-centered program. The Biblical stories used are tied into everyday living. The Bible comes alive in a new way for many. The Manual will explain the "relational" approach used ----- relating the scriptures to ourselves, to God, and to those around us.

LENTEN LIVING ROOM GROUPS (Page 2)

What size of Church could use the program?

Any Church or Study Group in the Fellowship could adapt the Lenten Program to their needs. It really does not matter whether a church has 2 or 20 groups --- what matters is that the groups provide a *vital Christian experience*. Don't think only in terms of those now attending your worship services. Some brothers and sisters *who won't yet come to your sanctuary* will be willing to accept an invitation to participate for just 6 weeks in a group meeting in someone's living room.

Don't try to cut corners

Jesus warned us to "count the cost". There is a cost to be paid in time and effort to have a successful program. Frankly evaluate the cost in time and effort with your Board. The Manual will provide you with "cook book" type of directions. Unless you have had wide experience working with small and intimate groups, don't try to cut corners. Take all of the recommended steps to insure the maximum effectiveness of your program. It would be my recommendation that any church follow the complete outline (from January 20 to April 18) or not try the Lenten program this year. A failure will make it harder to sell the idea later on.

ACT NOW !!!

Discuss the matter with your Board and let me have your request before the end of the month.

Address your letter to Jim Glyer, 1237 Brunswick, South Pasadena, CA 91030.

You should receive your packet containing materials and the Manual in the first week of 1976. That will give you about two weeks to read the material and recruit your Leaders, who will start their training no later than January 20.

Included with this mailing is a copy of the second week's Scripture material. I have used my own underlined copy to give an idea of how the Leader personally uses the material. This will give you a more exact idea of the biblical content typical of the Lenten series.

CRIPPLED AT THE KING'S TABLE

Scriptural Content: 2 Samuel 9:1-13

After the death of Saul and Jonathan in a battle with the Philistines at Mount Gilboa, David assumed the throne of Israel. After he had "settled in", he raised the question of our story, "Is there still anyone left of the house of Saul, that I may show him kindness for Jonathan's sake?"

There was one surviving son of Jonathan, Mephibosheth, a cripple. The story of Mephibosheth is told in 2 Samuel 4:4. He was a boy of five when the bad news came from Mt. Gilboa. His nurse picked him up and in the haste to flee the palace dropped him, crippling his feet.

David made room for Mephibosheth in his palace. The sick and the crippled may have been shown a compassion in Israel which they were not accorded elsewhere, but they weren't usually treated in a very kingly manner.

But, the story tells us, Mephibosheth "ate always at the king's table" and "was lame in both his feet."

APPLICATION

The Christian faith proclaims the miracle of healing, and we are encouraged to press toward health and wholeness.

Despite our healthy concern for being made whole, all of us carry about with us various kinds of lameness which will probably stay with us as long as we live.

"The church," said Kierkegaard, "is a hospital." In one sense we may call it a hospital for incurables. In this life no one will be perfected, no matter how eager or persevering.

That is the point with our story. The gospel is that we may eat at the King's table even though we are lame in both our feet.

One feels the truth of this as one gets older. There are weaknesses we thought we would outgrow, stupidities we thought we could transcend. But we remain cripples.

1. Yet, miracle of miracles, God accepts us, 2 and His loving family accepts us. They may get impatient with our stumbling feet, our self-pity, and our rationalizations; but when the table is set, there is always a place for us.

There used to be an interpretation of this text which made Jonathan a Jesus figure. Mephibosheth was shown kindness for Jonathan's sake; we are accepted because of Jesus. That's an acceptable interpretation. Jesus makes it OK for me to dangle my crippled feet under the King's table. There is space in God's home for me just as I am.

QUESTIONS

1. Do you regard our church as a hospital? What difference would it make if our members had such an attitude?
2. What "lameness" do you have which doesn't seem to yield to change or healing?
3. In your search for wholeness, what particular weakness do you see yourself dealing with effectively?
4. How do you feel about submitting this "lameness" honestly to a group of caring people?



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December 1, 1975
1237 Brunswick
South Pasadena, Ca. 91030

Dear Brother or Sister:

How I wish that it were possible for this to be an individual letter. Since I am writing to the clergy and worship coordinators of the entire Fellowship, there isn't time for that----but I hope you will take this mailing in a personal way.

Enclosed you will find an outline of the plan that we used for our Lenten Living Room Discussion Groups last spring. It was so highly successful that we are developing a revised version with new materials for Lent of 1976.

When some of the ideas and methods used in our Lenten series were presented at the Small Groups Dynamics Workshop in Dallas last summer, there was much interest. Since then, I have received inquiries from many churches. Frankly, it is hard to find time to respond to these. Therefore, I am sending this mailing to the entire Fellowship, offering to share our Lenten experience.

This is not an official mailing of the Fellowship---though it has been discussed with, and has the warm support of, Troy Perry, Jim Sandmire, Don Pedersen and Dick Mickley. Personally, I would welcome the chance to learn about some of your successful programs. Such an interchange could be good for all of us.

If your response to this letter is positive and you should want it, I would be glad to send to you a complete set of the materials we developed for Lent and a Manual explaining in some detail how to undertake each step. I feel that the program could be adapted to fit the local needs of all our churches.

The Lenten Living Room Groups were a spiritual lift for our people. Maybe your church will want to try the program for next Lent.

Sincerely,



Jim Glycer
Minister of Education, MCCLA

PS. I know how busy you are at this time of the year, but if I could hear from you before December 27th I could mail your packet at the less costly postal rates.

CLASS HANDOUT FOR SESSION ONE

MOVING BEYOND OUR FEAR

Adapted from "Casting Out Our Fears", *Wholeness In Worship* (Thomas and Sharon Neuffer Emswiler, Harper & Row Publishers, New York, 1980).

THE CHALLENGE

- Leader: Hear Christ Jesus say, "Fear not. I am the first and the last; I am the living one" (Revelation 1:17).
- People: Fear not? You've got to be kidding? In the last few years our community has been hit with a horrible, deadly disease called aids. Also this has aggravated the oppression and harassment directed against us.
- Leader: "In God I trust without a fear. What can flesh do to me?" (Psalm 56:4).
- People: We have every right to be afraid. We can be struck down and killed in any number of ways. In today's world you have to be out of your mind not to fear.

SCRIPTURE READING

Leader: Let's read and ponder these words from 1 John 4:7-12,16-21.

- Left : Dear friends, let us love one another, for love comes directly from God.
- Right : For those who love are God's children and know God.
- Left : God's love was manifested among us when God sent Jesus into the world so that we might discover the meaning of life through Christ.
- Right : God's love is primary. All love flows from the truth of God's love in Christ. This love has the power to bring forgiveness to us all.
- Left : Friends, if this is how God loved us, then we should love one another in the same way.
- Right : No one has ever seen God, but if we love one another, God lives in us and Christ's love is made perfect in us.
- Left : God is love; those who live in love live in God and God lives in them.
- Right : Thus we have courage as we face the judgment, because our life in this world is strengthened by Christ.
- Left : There is no fear in love; perfect love drives out all fear. Fear is brought about by punishment, but if we are perfected in love, we no longer worry about punishment.
- Right : We love because God first loved us.
- Left : If anyone says, "I love God," but hates sister or brother, that person is a liar.
- Right : If we do not love our sister or brother whom we see, we cannot love God whom we do not see. This, then, is the commandment Christ gave us: We who love God must love our sisters and brothers too.

A MOMENT OF SILENT REFLECTION

CLOSING PRAYER OF THANKSGIVING (in unison)

Thank you, God, for being with us when we're afraid. Thank you for coming here among us and knowing the taste of fear. Thank you for standing by us when we need you so much. Your love that is in us and around us helps us cast out our fears so that we can rejoice in life's great beauties. AMEN.

Session II: MOVING BEYOND OUR HOMOPHOBIA

Open with prayer and reporting back by each person on their prayer request of the previous week. (This process will begin each of the remaining sessions.) (20 minutes)

Leaders share the following information with the group. (you may want to copy and hand out.)

Homophobia is the unreasonable fear of homosexuals or homosexuality. It is a very pervasive phobia in our world today, particularly in the Christian church. Since we as gay/lesbian people are usually raised in homes where heterosexuality is assumed, we are taught homophobia. For us it becomes a fear of ourselves and those most like us.

As gay/lesbian people we act out our homophobia as horizontal violence. Vertical violence is when a powerful group oppresses a group of people who are less powerful in society, denying them access to the political, social, educational, economic and religious institutions which the powerful group controls. Horizontal violence is when oppressed people do similar things to other oppressed people. The horizontal violence is when we take out our anger at our oppression on each other, rather than who we are really angry with, our oppressors. The easiest way to notice when we are being horizontally violent is when we make big things little and little things big. What do MCC congregations fight about, our political, social and economic oppression? No. We fight about the color of choir robes, etc. We make big things little and little things big. We become excessively judgmental of our brothers and sisters. We take it out on people who are different from us. It is easy for us to use sexism and racism as weapons against each other.

Read Luke 10: 30-37. Samaritans were also Jews, and the animosity Jesus found between the two groups was a situation of horizontal violence, Jews oppressing Jews. There was even horizontal violence among the disciples (Mark 10: 35-45). What was Jesus' reaction to horizontal violence in these situations?

In the midst of the Aids crisis, many of us have avoided getting involved out of fear, rationalizing our fears with harsh, judgmental attitudes. Because aids is a sexually transmitted disease, many of us want to blame the aids patient. Somehow they would not have contracted the disease if they had not been "promiscuous." First, the medical evidence does not support this attitude. Secondly, what is promiscuous? One of the best definitions is someone who "gets it" more than I do. Promiscuity is a very relative term and inevitably puts those we judge at the mercy of our own homophobia. Since we are all homophobic to some degree, judging others sexual behavior inevitably leads to various forms of horizontal violence. Out of our own fear of homosexuality, we tend to judge sexual behavior of other gays or lesbians very harshly.

In reality, homosexuality is simply a sexual orientation. In and of itself, it is a gift from God of human sexuality. Sin is understood biblically as relational brokenness. Anything that interferes with our ability to love ourselves, each other, and God is sin. What actually interferes with our ability to love--homosexuality or homophobia? Which is actually sinful--homosexuality or homophobia?

Each person answer the following questions in turn:

How has your participation in MCC helped you to heal from homophobia?

When you have experienced horizontal violence from yourself toward someone else, or acted out toward you from a sister or brother, how have you responded as Jesus would?

What feelings that you would judge as horizontally violent has the Aids crisis provoked for you? How have you responded?

God acts to bring healing and wholeness to our lives. How has God acted to bring healing to you in your attitudes and feelings about your own sexuality?

(1 hour)

The Prayer Circle (30 minutes) and Refreshments (30 minutes)

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Session V: Grieving as Healing (cont.)

"Let me not pray to be sheltered from dangers but to be fearless in facing them;
 Let me not beg for the stilling of my pain but for the heart to conquer it;
 Let me not look for allies in life's battlefield, but to my own strength;
 Let me not crave in anxious fear to be saved, but hope for the patience to win my
 freedom;
 Grant me that I may not be a coward, feeling your mercy in my success alone;
 but let me find the grasp of your hand in my failure."

The Prayer Circle (30 minutes) and refreshments (30 minutes)

Session VI: WHAT IS OUR RESPONSE?

Opening prayer and reporting back on prayer requests. (30 minutes)

Read over the final section in "aids" brochure on responsibility.

Each person in turn share in response to the following questions:

What is the most important thing you have learned or way you have grown from
 being part of this group?

What is God showing you about yourself and aids?

What is one thing you will commit yourself to do in response to what you have
 learned and how you have grown? (1 hour)

Share in a potluck dinner together, ending with a simple eucharist, a remembering
 that as Christians this Holy Week we celebrate the victory of life over death,
 liberation out of oppression, hope out of despair. Give each person an opportunity
 to witness to that resurrection power in their own life. At the closing prayer
 circle, ask people to share prayer requests that they fulfill their commitment
 to action, as well as whatever longterm requests they may wish to share with each
 other. (1 hour)

EVALUATION SESSION

A week or two after Easter, call the coleaders together for an evaluation session.
 Check in on prayer requests. And answer the following questions:

What part of the series did you like best and why?

What part of the series did you like least and why?

What suggestions do you have for improvement?

What important personal learnings or growth can you share?

(The coordinator of the series should record these responses and mail them to
 Rev. Jennie Boyd Bull, Chair of Faith, Fellowship and Order Commission, PO Box 1145,
 Baltimore MD 21203. The responses will be used in refining the series and in
 further work toward growing together as a Fellowship in our response to Aids.)

This series was developed for FFO by Jennie Boyd Bull, with input from
 Steve Pieters, Sherre Boothman, Jeffrey Pulling, Karen Ziegler, Pat Crosby
 and Bill Bush. The brochure "Aids: Is It God's Judgement?" was developed by
 the entire Faith, Fellowship and Order Commission in 1985.

Session III: DOES GOD CAUSE SUFFERING?

Opening prayer and reporting back on prayer requests.

(20 minutes)

Each person write on a blank sheet of paper any words, phrases or images of God's judgment they had between the ages of 8 and 12. Share these with the entire group. (The leaders may wish to write down on newsprint or chalkboard for all to see.) Then ask each person to write words or images of God's judgment that come to mind for them now. Share these images and note similarities and differences from childhood concepts.

Leader present and participants read over the portion of "aids" brochure on "Does God cause suffering?" Discuss reactions briefly.

Ask each person to take blank paper and "journal" (write for themselves alone) about "When God sees a person with aids, God feels....." Women, ask God "Why them and not us?" Men, ask God, "Why us and not them?" After about five minutes, ask each person to share with the group what they wish from their journalling. (1 hour)

The Prayer Circle (30 minutes) and refreshments (30 minutes)

Session IV: IS SIN PUNISHED WITH DISEASE?

Opening prayer and reporting back on prayer requests.

(30 minutes)

As a group, brainstorm synonyms for the word "sick" in our culture. Then ask each person to remember a time when they were ill and share how they felt about themselves and how others related to them. Go around the group with each person sharing.

Read John 9: 1-3, and discuss the "aids" brochure section on "Is sin punished with disease?"

Brainstorm on associations with the word "Leper" Then read Mark 14: 3; Matthew 8: 1-4 and Luke 17:11-19 as stories of Jesus' relationships with lepers.

Each person share in response to the question: "How do stories of Jesus and the lepers make you feel about yourself and aids?"

The Prayer Circle (30 minutes) and Refreshments (30 minutes)

(1 hour)

Session V: GRIEVING AS HEALING

Opening prayer and reporting back on prayer requests.

(30 minutes)

Beginning with the leader, each person share briefly an experience when they have grieved over a loss and how healing happened for them.

A leader explains Elizabeth Kubler-Ross' concept of five stages of grief;

- denial and isolation
- anger
- bargaining
- depression
- acceptance and hope.

Explain that grief comes through many kinds of losses in our life; rejection, disappointment, death, disease, fear, any major change. Affirm that the process is different for each person, and our call is to listen, love and be there for one another as we heal. Refer to Fortunato's book, Embracing the Exile: Healing Journeys for Gay and Lesbian Christians, as an exploration of grieving as healing.

Each person share in response to the questions: "What are some ways you have denied the reality of aids for you?" and "What anger do you have or see in others about aids and how is it expressed?"

Close with the following meditation by Rabindranath Tagore, from Kubler-Ross' book On Death and Dying.

(1 hour)

Session I cont. Going around the circle, each person answer in turn, "My biggest fears about Aids are..."

Close with the responsive reading, scriptures and prayer from Wholeness in Worship (see p.6)

The Prayer Circle: Follow the process described in the Orientation Session for reflecting on personal prayer requests, sharing them, and joining in a closing prayer circle.

This same process will be repeated at the end of each session. (30 minutes)

Share refreshments and socializing for no more than 30 minutes.

Session II: MOVING BEYOND OUR HOMOPHOBIA

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God acts to bring healing and wholeness to our lives. How has God acted to bring healing to you in your attitudes and feelings about your own sexuality?

The Prayer Circle (30 minutes) and Refreshments (30 minutes)

(1 hour)

ORIENTATION SESSION: early February, for all group coleaders (more than one session, if possible)

INTRODUCTION: The leader opens with prayer. Beginning with the leader and moving in a circle around the group, each person is invited to answer the first of the following four "Quaker Questions":

1. Where did you live about the time you were 11 or 12?
2. How was your home heated?
3. What and where was the center of warmth in your life?
4. When did you first know God loves you?

After the first question has been answered, continue in turn with each of the other three questions (45 minutes)

NAMING FEARS AND QUESTIONS: Review the purposes and outline of the materials, from page one, and hand out copies of "Aids: Is It God's Judgement?" and briefly review. Make certain each leader has an adequate supply of brochures for their group and any other handouts you may be distributing.

Next focus on helping the leaders get in touch with their own fears, feelings and spiritual questions about aids. Be certain to emphasize that there are no right answers in this process, and that creating safe space to share our feelings and questions is the essential purpose of this series--in the faith that through seeking and sharing together God's healing presence is with us. Also emphasize that some participants for a variety of reasons may not want to talk about aids. If so, point out that disease, suffering, death and loss take many forms and we all must face them in our lives. Help them to find a grief or suffering issue they are willing to share with their faith community. Each person in turn answer each of these questions:

1. As a woman or as a man, what do you fear most about Aids?
2. If you had one question to ask God about Aids, what would it be?

Emphasize that vulnerability of the leaders is key to effective leadership, and promise support for one another throughout the series. Schedule a "mid-series checkin" about halfway through to allow coleaders to share how things are going, ask any questions and gain needed support. Exchange telephone numbers and encourage leaders to keep in touch with each other. Coleaders, depending on interest and ability, should take turns leading the sessions, including the opening prayer, leading discussion of prayer requests from the previous week, the subject and questions for the session, and the closing prayer circle. One or both should be responsible for followup calls to any absent members, arranging for refreshments, coordinating transportation needs, etc. Leave ample time to answer any questions. (1 hour)

THE PRAYER CIRCLE: Each participant takes about five minutes to write down the fears and questions most important to them on an index card. (You may play meditative music in the background.) Then each person shares one concern with the whole group, as a request for daily prayer during the series. Each person notes that request on the reverse of their card, until each person has a card of requests from others. Then, invite the group to form a circle and ask each person to pray silently for themselves, then for the person on their right, then on their left. One of the leaders invites each person to pray aloud in turn, squeezing the hand to their left when finished (they may choose to pray silently). (30 minutes)

REFRESHMENTS: Close with refreshments and socializing of no more than 30 minutes.

Session I: MOVING BEYOND OUR FEAR

Open with prayer and Four Quaker Questions (see Orientation session) (45 minutes)

Briefly explain the outline for the entire series, hand out brochures, and sign up participants to take turns bringing refreshments each week. (5 minutes)

Naming Our Fears. On blank sheets of paper, ask participants to list the things they are most afraid of in their lives, large enough to read 3 feet away. Then hold the paper in front of them and silently mill around and read each other's fears.

Participants find one other person (preferably not their spouse or best friend) and share with them "When I am afraid, I do/ I do not....." One person speaks and the other listens and then switch.

Rejoin as a large group, and share the kinds of things we do and don't do when we are afraid. Do our fears polarize us as women and men? by race and class?

DO NOT FEAR, ONLY BELIEVE (Mk.5:36)

A Lent Living Room Dialogue Series for Spiritual Growth in Response to the AIDS Crisis developed by the Faith, Fellowship and Order Commission, UFMCC,

PURPOSE: We in UFMCC face a unique challenge to minister within our community and beyond as we face the aids epidemic among us. Parts of that ministry are pastoral care of persons with aids and their families and education and advocacy in our community and society. But another major pastoral ministry is also before us-- meeting the challenges for spiritual growth that this epidemic presents.

This six-week study series is designed to enable lay people in UFMCC to explore the basic feelings and questions we all face when confronted with aids or any major suffering or loss. It is designed to equip all the saints of MCC for ministry with one another and our community as we explore our fears, our homophobia, our views of God's judgment, the relation of sin and disease, our grieving as healing, and are challenged to active response in our lives. It helps lesbians and gay men talk together from our different contexts of lowest and highest risk groups for this disease.

STRUCTURE: The series is divided into six sessions of two hours each, followed by a half hour for socializing and refreshments. It is designed to fit within the format of the Lenten Study Groups widely used in UFMCC, and is similar to the series on Baptism, Eucharist and Ministry distributed by FFO in 1985. Of course, it may be used any time of the year. Your congregation is encouraged to establish as many 6-to 10-person small groups as possible to meet weeknights for six weeks during Lent. (Some congregations use existing parish family structures; others organize several study groups in people's homes; others use existing midweek discussion times.) The final session includes a shared meal and eucharist and falls during Holy Week. Two co-leaders should be chosen in advance to lead each group, and should meet with the series coordinator at least two or three weeks in advance to review the materials and coordinate the signup of participants.

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Week 1: Feb. 12, Ash Wednesday groups begin

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Wrapup evaluation after Easter with coleaders.

RESOURCES: Each participant will need a copy of "AIDS: Is It God's Judgement? A Christian View of Faith, Hope and Love from Metropolitan Community Church." This FFO brochure may be ordered from UFMCC Church Services for 25¢ each (or 25 for \$5.25; 50 for \$10; 100 for \$15). You may also wish to duplicate some of the materials within the instructions for each session and hand them out to participants. Coleaders may wish to order the 12-page document, "Is Aids God's Judgment?" by FFO from which the brochure was taken (Order from Erik Browning, FFO Clerk, 639 Hamilton Ave., Portsmouth, VA 23707, \$1.) Coleaders will need index cards and pens or pencils and paper for participants at each meeting.

CLASS HANDOUT FOR SESSION ONE

MOVING BEYOND OUR FEAR

Adapted from "Casting Out Our Fears", *Wholeness In Worship* (Thomas and Sharon Neuffer Emswiler, Harper & Row Publishers, New York, 1980).

THE CHALLENGE

Leader: Hear Christ Jesus say, "Fear not. I am the first and the last; I am the living one" (Revelation 1:17).

People: Fear not? You've got to be kidding? In the last few years our community has been hit with a horrible, deadly disease called aids. Also this has aggravated the oppression and harassment directed against us.

Leader: "In God I trust without a fear. What can flesh do to me?" (Psalm 56:4).

People: We have every right to be afraid. We can be struck down and killed in any number of ways. In today's world you have to be out of your mind not to fear.

SCRIPTURE READING

Leader: Let's read and ponder these words from 1 John 4:7-12,16-21.

Left : Dear friends, let us love one another,
for love comes directly from God.

Right : For those who love are God's children and know God.

Left : God's love was manifested among us when God sent Jesus into the world so that we might discover the meaning of life through Christ.

Right : God's love is primary. All love flows from the truth of God's love in Christ. This love has the power to bring forgiveness to us all.

Left : Friends, if this is how God loved us, then we should love one another in the same way.

Right : No one has ever seen God, but if we love one another, God lives in us and Christ's love is made perfect in us.

Left : God is love; those who live in love live in God and God lives in them.

Right : Thus we have courage as we face the judgment, because our life in this world is strengthened by Christ.

Left : There is no fear in love; perfect love drives out all fear. Fear is brought about by punishment, but if we are perfected in love, we no longer worry about punishment.

Right : We love because God first loved us.

Left : If anyone says, "I love God," but hates sister or brother, that person is a liar.

Right : If we do not love our sister or brother whom we see, we cannot love God whom we do not see. This, then, is the commandment Christ gave us: We who love God must love our sisters and brothers too.

A MOMENT OF SILENT REFLECTION

CLOSING PRAYER OF THANKSGIVING (in unison)

Thank you, God, for being with us when we're afraid. Thank you for coming here among us and knowing the taste of fear. Thank you for standing by us when we need you so much. Your love that is in us and around us helps us cast out our fears so that we can rejoice in life's great beauties. AMEN.

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